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A TRAGEDY OF THE WISCONSIN PINERY

Rude are the methods of administering justice in the wilderness or on the frontier. The refinements of legal procedure as practiced in older-established society are likely to be disregarded in favor of resort to a rough-and-ready adjustment of accounts between the parties concerned. Particularly is this likely to be the case when to the other factors ordinarily present on the frontier is added the clash of different races, the one superior and masterful, the other inferior and submissive.

In the pioneer period of Wisconsin's development occurred numerous clashes between representatives of the red race and the white, not always due, it is sad to confess, to wrongdoing on the part of the former. Commonly these events pass into oblivion with no record being made concerning them for the enlightenment of other times. Jointly to John Bracklin, one of the participants, and to Henry E. Knapp are we indebted for the preservation of the narrative which follows. In itself an excellent story of adventure, simply yet forcefully told, it possesses also a real historical significance in that many of the aspects which the tale presents are typical of similar clashes between red man and white in the age-long period of association and struggle they have undergone since the first coming of the whites to America.

The narrator, James Bracklin, was the father of John L. Bracklin whose remarkable description of a Wisconsin forest fire was published in the issue of this magazine for September, 1917. James Bracklin was for over thirty years superintendent of logging and log driving for the Knapp-Stout Lumber Company of Menomonie. Barker, his associate in

the adventure, was Bracklin's predecessor in this position, holding it for a period of several years. Concerning the recording of the narrative Mr. Knapp writes: "I took this down in shorthand as he [Bracklin] related it to the directors of our company, at one of their annual meetings, at their request. We had all heard it before, and the older members who were living here at the time remembered the circumstances and said it was all true—only that Mr. Bracklin minimized his part in it."

JAMES BRACKLIN'S ACCOUNT OF AN OCCURRENCE
IN 1864

Two men had gone out from Stillwater to look over a site for a logging camp. They were up in St. Croix County, and from what was afterwards learned this is what occurred to them:

The men were walking through a strip of brush land half to three quarters of a mile wide along the river; they were apparently making their way to the river. Two Indians were coming up the river in a canoe and heard the men talking, and the Indian that shot himself, a man about twenty-one years of age and a very hard looking citizen, said that the other Indian proposed that they land and kill the white men. This he claimed he did not want to do, as he was a good Indian, but that they did land, and the other Indian shot one of the men. The Indian that did not want to do the shooting claimed to me afterwards that he was horror stricken; that he was a good Indian, but that the other Indian kept urging him to shoot, shoot, shoot, and finally on the impulse of the moment he shot and badly wounded the second man. The first man who was shot was wounded and ran away and wandered around with the other Indians after him and finally he came back to where his partner was lying, and the Indians caught the man and killed both of them. The Indians then went to work and cut them all up into small pieces and sunk them in the lake. They claimed that by cutting into small pieces and puncturing frequently with holes there would be no air form, and pieces would not rise to the surface.

When the men did not return home their friends were uneasy and finally began to search for them and did search for three months. In June, 1864, about three hundred were said to be out in the woods in parties searching for them. The search ran along until August or early September. There were several bands of Chippewa encamped at Rice Lake and Chetek. The old Chetek Chief learned that troops were on the way from Menomonie and he became very uneasy. There was no foundation for the fact that troops were coming, but he heard it so, and he thought better to "squeal." The Indians at Rice Lake had been complaining about the dam that we had built there raising the water so that it pulled the rice out by the roots and spoiled their rice beds, and we had consulted with the old Chief several times and tried to settle matters with him, but without coming to any understanding that was satisfactory to him. The first head of water we drew from Rice Lake after the dam was built, the logs jammed about Cranberry Creek. This was August, 1864.

I went down to Menomonie, and Captain Wilson told me of the disappearance of these men in St. Croix County, and I said they must have been murdered by the Indians or they would have been found. We were out in the woods a good deal and knew that if they killed some and were not found out, they would likely kill others, and that this should be looked into, and the murderers found if possible. Captain Wilson said that was right, and that if we should find them and needed any help, to send word to him and he would send us help. So when the old Chief at Chetek sent a messenger to us at Louseburg, Barron County, Wisconsin, where I was hauling logs with four or five ox teams and seven or eight men, we thought that, as he wanted us to come down and see him at Chetek it was on account of the rice beds again, and we did not want to go, as we were busy, but the messenger said that the old Chief had something to tell us, so Mr. Barker and I walked down there. (Samuel B. Barker at that time had a small trading post at Louseburg). A crew of men were at work finishing the Chetek dam. It was late in the evening, so we went to bed in a tent, and the next morning the cook said the Indians had come from the rice beds and were camping along the Pokegama Narrows, and that there was a great deal of commotion that morning, and that some were coming down the lake in a canoe, with a flag flying.

They finally landed and camped right in front of the shanty and put up a flag, the Stars and Stripes. The cook said that war was about to begin sure. S. P. Barker knew this old Chief, and the Chief thought a great deal of Barker, and word came in to Barker that the Chief wanted to interview Barker and Bracklin out in the jack pines in a secluded place; that he had a very important communication to make. We did not want to go so far, but finally went out fifty rods, and then a little farther, and a little farther, and finally in an open space the old Chief sat down, and we sat down also. The Chief was a very ceremonious old fellow. He opened the ball by inquiring whether the man that had been lost over in St. Croix County had been found. I did not know, but I did not let him know it, but I said: "Oh, yes, they were killed by the Indians." The Chief smoked a minute and said, "That is true," and then went on and told us all about it.

The Chief understood that troops were coming, and as his band did not have anything to do with this murder he wanted us to protect his band and tell the commander of the troops that they were good Indians. He told us all about the murder and who the men were. I knew one of the men and so did Barker. He said that the men got quite a lot of money from the clothes of one of the murdered men, and we learned that it was probably about \$1,500, as one of these men was a kind of a miser, who carried his money with him wherever he went. We knew that there were no troops coming, and that there was no danger in that direction to the old Chief, but told him that we would look after his interests, and decided that we would keep an eye out for the gentleman Indian that did the murder, and so we went back to camp.

Barker went on to Louseburg. Joe Queen was one of the ox teamsters, and we used to let the cattle run in the woods at night, and Joe went out to look for them in the morning and walked as far as Louseburg, not finding them. Barker sent word to me to come to Louseburg at once, and I got there at seven in the morning, and Barker told me that one of those Indians had showed up, and that there were quite a lot of Indians there, and we decided to try and catch him, but did not know how we were to proceed. Barker pro-

posed that we send for the seven men that were at Chetek, but I said no, that we had better take him ourselves.

The Indians were camped just a little way above Louseburg. I was not on particularly good terms with the Indians myself just then. They were feeling good and had plenty to eat and were gambling. They had lots of devices for gambling. One game was to lay a blanket out on the ground, and the leader had two moccasins and a bullet, and he moved them around over the blanket, and then betting would commence as to where the bullet had been left, under which moccasin. After all the bets were in the fellow picks up a rod and strikes the moccasin that had or that he thought had the bullet under it. These Indians bet anything, from their moccasins even to their souls. We saw them gambling and of course looked around and we saw the Indian we wanted sitting on a log, looking on. There were seventy-five to one hundred Indians there. The gamesters paid no attention to us. I noticed a vacant seat on the log beside the Indian, and I thought I would just go over and sit down beside him, so I walked over quietly, not looking at him, just looking at the place where I was going to sit down, but just before I got to it the Indian got up and stepped over the log away a step or two, and I sat down. He went off and sat down somewhere else, and Barker followed my tactics and tried to sit down by the Indian where he was then, and then he moved again, and I tried to get near him again, and we kept up that kind of tactics for perhaps an hour and a half.

Finally one player got broke, and he was not satisfied to stop playing, and he went to a tent and got two mink skins. This was in the summer time, and mink skins were pretty poor then, but he brought them out and wanted to sell them to Barker. Barker kept some calico and things of that kind to trade with the Indians in a little house that he had there, keeping them locked up in a chest. Barker told him that they were not much good, but he wanted a little calico to go on with the game, and Barker finally told him that he would give him 25 cents each in goods for them, and they started down to the store to get them. All the Indians came down. They wanted to do a little trading, too, and they all came into the store, but this one Indian stayed outside.

Barker went into the little building which we called a store and noticing that this Indian did not come in he thought he would try to get him in by some strategy and so he began feeling around in his pocket for his keys to open the chest, and while he had the keys there he made an excuse that he would have to go down to his camp a few rods away after the keys, and so he stepped out, but the Indian stepped right away from the door, and then Barker went on down, but looking back saw that the Indian had stepped into the door again, and Barker turned around and came back, thinking that the Indian would then walk into the store ahead of him, but he did not do that, but stepped back out again. Barker went in and made an excuse to pick up something that he had apparently forgotten to take down to the camp and then went out again and down to the camp, and the Indian again stood in the door, but when Barker came back, instead of going in, he stepped off to one side again, so Barker came in and got his goods out on the little counter, and of course kept his eye on the Indian as much as possible, and I did, too, though of course neither pretending to do so.

There was a fiddle on the wall, and I took it down and began to saw away, and the Indian stood in the door, and after a while he forgot himself and came inside. Of course Barker saw this, and he worked his way down behind the counter quietly, all the time talking to the Indians and showing the goods, and when he got pretty near down to the door and saw that the Indian was off his guard, Barker jumped over the counter towards the door. The Indian saw it and rushed for the door. Barker grabbed him, and the first grab tore his shirt off slick and clean, and the next grab he got him by the wrist, and the Indian was all outside except the wrist that Barker held.

In the meantime, I rushed to the rescue and I grabbed the Indian by the hair and jerked him back inside of the room and closed the door. The Indians, in the meantime, before I closed the door, had all rushed out. As soon as I closed the door and put in the pin, the door came in broken off of its hinges, and all the Indians came in with it. We had pulled the Indian to the back part of the store, and he had of course fought like a good fellow, and to keep him we had pounded him and kicked him, in the mêlée, and when these Indians came in they grabbed hold of him to pull him out of the door, and they pulled him

one way and we pulled the other, and he was dragged back and forth in that store from one end to the other a great many times, and he was so bruised up that he was practically useless himself. He could not help himself, or, if he could, he would have got away. We kept this thing up for about an hour, and they could not get him, and they saw it, so they sent to Rice Lake and the Forks of Yellow River for a band of Indians that were encamped there to come and help them.

There was an old Indian called "Krokodokwa," and he came and asked what the trouble was. This old Indian was friendly, and Barker, after telling the old Indian what we were trying to do said, "I think I can get this old Krokodokwa to take a note down to Chetek to Henry Sawyer to come up and bring his gang, and so I wrote a note and Barker talked with Krokodokwa and he said he would take the note down. The Indians outside got wind of it in some way or other and they told the old Indian that they would kill him if he did. He took the note and ran for the bank of the river, and then along under the bank down the river quite a number of rods. The Indians got out on the bank and began shooting at him, but fortunately for him they did not hit him, and he finally got across the river and got away, but they kept chasing and shooting at him, and for half an hour we could hear shots. He delivered the note, and Sawyer quietly said to the men, "Barker and Bracklin want all hands at Louseburg. Did not say what for." And they started along slowly, the old Indian and Sawyer bringing up the rear.

The old Indian said to Sawyer, "You better hurry up. Barker and Bracklin are in trouble up there; the Indians are making trouble with them." Sawyer then told the men, and they deliberated as to whether they would go up and get murdered or what they would do. They did not have any arms, except perhaps one old gun, but they finally came along until they got near enough to Louseburg so they could see the camp, but they could not see anything of Barker or me, and while stopping there the band of Indians from Yellow River came up behind them and drove them into Louseburg. The Indians crowded around and demanded that we deliver the Indian we had to them. We said, "You can't have him." The Indians had come down from Rice Lake too. We explained to them several times why we were

holding this Indian and that we were not going to do him any harm, but would send him to Stillwater where he would have trial. We told them several times that he had killed two men. They tried several times to get him away, but failed.

We had one old horse there, and I said to Barker that we better send word right away to Captain Wilson, so I wrote a note, and Joe Queen got the horse out and took the note, and I told him to get to Menomonie just as quick as he possibly could. The Indians fired at him as he went away but did not hit him. The Indians all the rest of that day were very uneasy and they yelled and caroused, and finally it came dark, and we did not have any candles or oil or any lamps. The only thing that there was there was some deer tallow and candle wicking and the moulds, and Barker went down to the shanty to make some candles.

The mother and sister of the Indian we had, came in to see him, and we let them in, and the parting between the mother and the son was really very touching. She evidently knew that he had been advised by the other Indians to kill himself rather than be taken away. There was one young Indian came to the door and asked to be allowed to go in and see this other Indian, and the Indian himself said yes he would like to see him, and so we let him in, and he sat down on the floor near him and talked away for half an hour, and then he got up and went out. We never thought of his bringing in any arms to the Indian, but he had brought and delivered to the Indian an old two-barrel pistol. Our Indian went over close to the wall, and with his face to the wall at a crack where the chinking was out, he sang a song, and the Indians on the outside kept passing along on the outside and speaking a word to this Indian now and then, and about nine o'clock a cap snapped. I knew that it was inside the building, because I could see the flash, and while the Indians had been shooting a good deal outside and some of the bullets had come through the walls during that afternoon and evening, this was different from any of those shots, and I did not know what he intended to do, whether he intended to fire among us and create a commotion and in the dark escape, but at any rate I think he placed the pistol over his shoulder and pulled the trigger. I saw the light of the flash and jumped for the Indian, but our men jumped, too, and rushed for the door, and as it was

dark they shoved me along towards the door, and one man in the rush got out of the door, but I braced myself in the door and held on and kept the others from getting out. I kept the door barricaded.

In the meantime, the Indian had placed the pistol against his breast low down and pulled the trigger. Of course he made a big hole in himself and finally he fell over. I did not know whether he was playing possum or not. By this time Barker came with the candles and I said to Barker, "I am afraid that fellow is playing possum. We better be pretty careful." So we closed the door and guarded it, and then went and examined the Indian, and he was a good Indian fast enough, that is, dead. The Indians outside were very much excited and they came right away and accused me to Barker of having killed the Indian. I told Barker it didn't matter whether I did or not; the Indian was dead. They wanted the Indian's body, and we said we would not give it to them, and finally, after keeping him until about three o'clock in the afternoon we buried him.

Joe Queen had reached Menomonie early in the morning and went right to Captain Wilson's house and told the Captain how the situation was and gave him my note, and the Captain at once sent out to get a number of men, and he sent seventeen of them up in wagons by way of Twenty-two Mile Ford. As soon as Joe Queen started out some of the Indians started out and followed down after him, and during the day the Indians around the cabin at Louseburg would hear every five minutes as to how the help that was coming from Menomonie were proceeding. We could tell every five minutes just where they were and what progress they were making. Of course they made a mistake in the number that was coming; they sometimes got it as high as twenty-five wagon loads of help, but that help was coming they knew. Of course they must have got their information by signals.

When we buried the Indian three old Indians came and looked on, and Barker told them what this Indian had done and how he had cut up these men, etc., and he did not tell it all, for one of them spoke up and said, "Yes, he cut off his ears too." The men from Menomonie came along as far as my camp, and there they heard that the Indian was dead and buried, so they stopped and got some supper and then came on. The Indians there wanted protection from the army, but

the army came and there were only seventeen men, and so we sat around and visited and talked the matter over that night and they went back.

The next morning there was not a spot on my body that was not as sore as a boil. I tell you that after we got started in that scrape we had to stay in it, or else there would have been no living in that part of the country. If they had got that Indian away from us, we could not have stayed there. We would have been glad to have got out of it within two minutes after we were in it, if we could have done so, but, as we could not, we made the best of it. Of course, those of you who know Barker know that he was a six-footer, a giant in strength, and as brave as a lion. He didn't know what fear was, but he was of a very quiet disposition; he never swore—was educated for a minister—but during that fight he hit every Indian within reach and was a terror.